## Discussion Questions

# Chapter 2 GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND POLICY ACTORS

Questions for small groups or larger class discussion.

1. One-minute writing/discuss: Make a distinction between the U.S. system of government and an authoritarian or unilateral form of government in terms of how policies are made. Consider the time it takes and the actors involved, including the role of the public.
2. Discuss: Should the federal government regulate the legalization of marijuana, or should it be left to each state to decide? Arguments for, against. Other issues: immigration, same-sex marriage.
3. Laptop search: Explore the Executive Branch. Assign groups of students to each/some of the 15 cabinet departments. Conduct a scavenger hunt online: Go to [www.USA.gov](http://www.USA.gov) and select “Government Agencies.” Identify the name of the secretary, the department’s mission, significant new initiatives, and any well-known subsidiary agencies. Present to class: surprises, new insights.
4. Discuss: What is public opinion, and how do you know? How does the public express its opinions? What are the things to keep in mind when reviewing polling data?
5. Laptop search: Visit the website [www.gallop.com](http://www.gallop.com). Choose a hot topic and ask students their own views. Use [www.polleverywhere.com](http://www.polleverywhere.com) to poll the class on some of these topics. What role does public opinion play in formulating public policy?
6. One-minute writing/discuss: What do you already know about lobbying by interest groups?
7. Discuss: Are ordinary citizens well represented by interest groups, or do certain groups have privileged access at the expense of others?
8. Discuss: How do the media influence our local, state, or federal policies? Is this influence appropriate?
9. Discuss: Is it acceptable that young people tend to be “checked out” when it comes to policy making? What impact will this lack of participation have on our government? Project what may happen in 25 years if citizens do not participate in U.S. or state governments. With your group, propose ways to engage your generation in civic interest and activities.
10. Discuss: What can be done to improve the public’s (i.e., your) policy capacity?